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MARIJUANA ACTIVIST RECEIVES 15 YEAR SENTENCE

FRESNO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that DUSTIN ROBERT COSTA, also known as Reverend DC Greenhouse, 60, of Winton, California, was sentenced by United States District Judge Anthony W. Ishii to 15 years in prison for cultivating and possessing with the intent to distribute 908 marijuana plants having a street value of over one million dollars, and possessing a firearm in connection with the drug trafficking offenses.

The case was investigated by the Merced Multi-Agency Narcotic Task Force.

According to the evidence, COSTA, a self-proclaimed advocate of medicinal marijuana, was growing marijuana at his residence in Winton, California in February, 2004, when agents of the Merced Multi-Agency Narcotic Task Force (MMNTF) executed a drug search warrant there. The agents found 254 mature marijuana plants in a greenhouse and 654 "mother" plants and clones in a separate wooden add-on structure which COSTA had constructed on his property. The agents also found approximately eight pounds of dried marijuana and a marijuana processing center inside his barricaded living quarters, along with distribution labels, which described COSTA's marijuana as, "Super Clean AAA premium smooth and tasty" and "Grown by DC Hissell [sic]," a loaded shotgun, shotgun shells, scale, sifters, and packaging material. PG&E records for the electrical usage of COSTA's residence showed an average daily usage of 184 kilowatts, which is unusually high and is consistent with a large indoor marijuana cultivation operation, since indoor marijuana cultivation generally requires the use of high intensity lighting and other electrical equipment.

After a two week trial, the jury rejected the defense claim that COSTA was a cannabis connoisseur who needed large quantities of marijuana for personal medicinal use. Although California voters passed Proposition 215 in 1996, which legalized marijuana for medical use in certain situations, marijuana remains an illegal drug under federal law, as affirmed by the United States Supreme Court in 2005.

"It cannot be any more clear that the cultivation and sale of marijuana is strictly prohibited under federal law. Mr. Costa conducted his illegal activities with full knowledge of this fact and has been properly tried, and sentenced, in the federal courts." said United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen A. Escobar, who prosecuted the case, COSTA received an enhanced sentence of ten years for the drug convictions, due to a prior conviction for cultivating marijuana in 1999 in Modesto, and five years for the firearms conviction.

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